

Tape 18

Side A, 1/8 - 1/4

1 FEB 1980

REMINDER MEMORANDUM

Let's develop a notebook on ~~WHAT IS~~ the latest tone we have given the President on each major problem/region/country, this book to be kept jointly by the NIOs and the PDB Staff.

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Stephen S. Rosenfeld

On the Beam

I've been browsing through a book-length government compilation of the broadcasts the Soviet Union has been beaming to Iran from its Baku-based clandestine "National Voice of Iran." For instance, last Dec. 14: "A torrent of blood is flowing in our homeland. They kill and kill indiscriminately; they kill on the shah's order and on Carter's order so that... the free plunder of oil may continue."

On Nov. 5: "The occupation of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by struggling young people, regardless of its outward aspects, is in fact a decisive response to the overt and covert conspiracies of U.S. imperialism and to the U.S. government's hostile act of settling the deposed shah in the United States."

And so on. Shameless and filthy stuff, courtesy of Leonid Brezhnev.

The United States has done three things about the flow.

1) The State Department has protested. Close listeners have since detected a reduced content of outright anti-American falsehoods in the broadcasts of National Voice of Iran, which services the Moscow-controlled Iranian Communist Party, and in other Soviet broadcasts. For instance, the National Voice of Iran has suggested—though with no noticeable impact—that it's counterproductive to continue holding the hostages.

2) The Voice of America, the United States' own official station, has, in the course of expanding its crisis broadcasting, taken to answering indirectly the kinds of charges made by Soviet radio. VOA does not want to give the Soviet broadcasts the status of a direct rebuttal, but it does seek to deal with the political reality—the intense suspicion of the United States—they help foster.

It is something of an unequal battle, at least in the short run. Moscow's radios, seeking tactical advantage, play deceitfully on deeply held rages and fears. The Voice of America, hoping for long-term credibility, scripts for a mythical rational man: acceptability in the continuing international marketplace of information and ideas is, to its credit, its goal. We no longer run—and, as far as I'm concerned, we don't need—the clandestine radios that would let us play Moscow's game.

Soviet programs have a further immediate advantage: broadcast from close by, they go

into Iran on medium-wave signals easily caught by the transistor radios most people use. Since last month some American programs have been broadcast on a medium-wave transmitter on Rhodes, but most go on long-distance short-wave signals and are not well received. We're scavenging for medium-wave locations now.

3) The most intriguing American reaction to the Soviet broadcasts is the new attention to reaching, by radio, the Soviet Union's own rapidly growing Moslem population of 50 million. According to David Binder of The New York Times, President Carter has decided to increase broadcasts in seven languages by VOA and by Radio Liberty, a federally funded station that tries to serve as a surrogate free press for Soviet audiences.

Carter's new plan has an obvious Moslem angle. Islam is in these days. The explosion of Iran, culminating in the hostage crisis and its regional fallout, has created a market at the political level for Islamic matters that formerly flourished only at the specialists' level. The new radio programs directed at Moslems—mostly Moslems outside the Soviet Union—are one early result.

The Soviet angle is something else: the project of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the president's national security adviser. He has long felt that the Soviet Union, as a state made up of scores of more or less suppressed "nationality" or ethnic groups, is vulnerable over time to splitting tactics or, if you wish, to open, friendly, humane, legal and peaceable appeals to the ethnics' "human rights." The evident basis of the new broadcasting emphasis is to reach out to the Islamic side of Soviet Moslems, as distinguished from their Soviet side, to increase the cost to the Kremlin of keeping them in line, and to identify the United States as sympathetic to their (as to all Moslems') Islamic longings.

In brief, hardball but fair ball. The Kremlin, which often acts as though it had little faith in its ethnics' loyalty, will no doubt fume. But radio beams both ways. There is a certain nice justice at work here: Moscow's inflammatory use of radio in Iran helped Brzezinski lobby through a program that had previously been but a glint in his eye. I wasn't always ready for it, but I am now. I see nothing wrong with talking in a straight, accountable, publicly acknowledged voice to anyone who wants to listen.